

Iowa Current Developments



October 2009, Iowa Current Developments
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
210 Walnut Street, Room 693, Des Moines, IA 50309

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"Iowa Natural Resources
Conservation Service:
Excellence in helping peo-
ple conserve and improve
our natural resources, com-
munities and environment."

A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Rich Sims,
State Conservationist*

Congratulations on a very successful fiscal year 2009. It is a year many of us won't forget for its challenges and opportunities. I appreciate all you have done to help meet our goals while completing the extra work involving audits and implementing new Farm Bill programs and Initiatives.

As we enter fiscal year 2010, we are in the middle of implementing the new Conservation Stewardship Program. I am proud to say Iowa landowners submitted more than 1,000 applications including more than 500,000 acres. And as a nation more than 33 million acres were submitted in CSP applications, meeting our national goal. Your efforts played an important role in meeting that national goal and are greatly appreciated.

In the next few months we will begin working on a new Initiative, The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI). This \$240 million Initiative was announced by Sec. Vilsack in Des Moines in September. (More information about the Initiative can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov.) This will be an exciting opportunity for us to practice precision conservation in a few key watersheds during the next four years to help landowners reduce nutrient loading of the Mississippi River Basin.

Thanks again for a year full of amazing accomplishments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Sims". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Doug Olemann: Wyoming Soil Survey Detail

I had the opportunity to work a two-month detail (July-Aug) for the soil survey program in Wyoming. I worked in Lincoln County and was stationed at Lyman. I soon discovered mapping soils is much different for 3rd order soil surveys and the ability to navigate around was much more difficult. My work area was about 1 1/2 hours north from Lyman and a good share of the distance was on 2 track roads. There is a saying in Wyoming about 2 track roads; "they are there if they are still there" and many of them would dead end without warning.

My area also had some historical significance because the Oregon Trail passed through it with markers identifying the trail. Ft. Bridger, just west of Lyman, was a site for a pony express station, a military fort and the Mormon Trail.

During my detail, I delineated map units based on ecological sites and completed soil descriptions in the area assigned to me. My area had 6 ecological sites in a 10-14 inch rainfall area. Snow blown areas on the northeast slopes also influenced the soil development and vegetation to a large extent with Aspen growing in these areas. Elevation in the area ranged from about 6500 feet to almost 8000 feet making breathing difficult climbing 45% slopes! I identified types of vegetation, marked each stop with a Garmin GPS and attempted to describe the soil to 60 inches with a spade and bucket auger. Bed-rock layers and large stones in the



Soil Scientist Doug Oelmann in the Wyoming brush during his two month detail.

profiles sometimes made the task difficult. Many of the soils were Aridisols with thin A horizons and calcic horizons. I completed about 170 points and 30,000 acres in my 6 weeks of field work. There were several types of sage in my area, including Basin, Black, Mountain and Early sage. Service berry and Snowberry along with native grasses were also present.

Wildlife observed in my area included Antelope, Deer, Coyotes, Jackrabbits and many other small animals. (There are more Antelope in Wyoming than there are people!) There were also cattle and sheep grazing in the area and I observed cowboys on horseback pushing cattle to another range on several occasions.

The humidity was much lower than Iowa with temps reaching low 90's just on a few days. It rained twice, only about .2 of an inch each time. Having windy days was quite common in this area and it would usually start about noon each day. The last few evenings on my detail in late August the temps were in the low 30's. The growing season in the area is about 60 days. I enjoyed working in Wyoming, it was hard work, but I will remember the valuable experience for a long time. It was interesting to see how other state programs operate in the soil survey program.

Potato Pickers: RC&D Managed Garden Supplies Local Food Pantry



Carroll Master Gardeners Carol Klein and Dennis Molitar with 111 pounds of potatoes donated to a food pantry.

Members of Carroll County Master Gardeners delivered 111 pounds of freshly dug potatoes and 128 pounds of fresh picked tomatoes to the Community of Concern Food Pantry in Carroll this year.

The produce was raised as a growing experiment at the Carroll Community Garden. Carol Klein of Carroll was the lead investigator for the project. "We have always heard about planting potatoes in the full of the moon on Good Friday. We wanted to test to see if that really was a good idea. The 111 pounds of potatoes were a by-product of that test," said Klein. The test compared three rows of identical Kennebec potatoes planted in two-week intervals.

"Every year is different and no one rule applies every time, but it appears that the middle row, planted April 24, did the best because it produced the most pounds with the least number of plants".

The 126 pounds of tomatoes came in three pickings from 24 plants. They are Celebrity tomatoes; a determinate tomato plant. That means they have one big yield rush instead of a lower but longer yield over many weeks.

Roxanne Reinhart, director of the Community of Concern, noted that she's seen an increase in the number of clients this summer to the food pantry. "We really appreciate this donation of fresh tomatoes and potatoes from the Master Gardeners and our clients will too," she said.

The Community Garden is a service to Carroll County residents provided by the Carroll Park and Recreation Department. There were 84 garden plots this summer. The M&M Divide RC&D manages the Carroll, Willey, and Denison Community Gardens.

Water Quality: Student Workshop in Dubuque

District Conservationist Theresa Weiss and District Environmental Specialist Eric Schmechel participated in a two-day Student Environmental Workshop at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium on Sept. 24 and 25. More than 30 students and teachers from Iowa and Illinois attended this river-to-the-ocean workshop linking the Mississippi River watershed to the Gulf.

This workshop included field trips to the Mississippi River and a land tour including farmland and urban BMPs. Weiss showed participants on-farm practices including crop rotations, strip cropping, terraces, organic crops, and a rotational grazing system. Schmechel talked about the Upper Catfish Creek Watershed project, and showed the students a rain garden, infiltration trench, a permeable asphalt paving parking lot, permeable paver side walk and parking lot, and stream bank stabilization projects. The students also learned how to use testing kits to compare the different water samples they had gathered.

The students developed projects to take back to their classrooms to develop and implement projects to promote water quality in their communities.



Who's the Thriftiest Shopper: Contest Benefits Local Food Pantry

The Calhoun County NRCS and FSA employees held a "Who's the Thriftiest Shopper?" contest. Each employee donated \$5 and then the money was split evenly between the two offices. Each office picked two of their thriftiest shoppers and sent them to Dollar General to buy non-perishable items. FSA was the winner with a total of 49 items and NRCS brought back 32 items. The items were donated to a local Food Pantry. NRCS provided the winning FSA office with treats.

**Congratulations on achieving
95% or greater in all the BPI
performance goals in 2009!**



Award Winning: Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen

For the third consecutive year, Outreach Coordinator Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen received the President's Award from the American Indian/Alaska Native Employee Association at the Association's annual meeting in Greenbay, Wis. this summer. She also received the 2009 Outstanding Member award.

Tanya will serve as the group's president beginning in January and has been a member since 1995, when it was first formed.

Currently she serves as the Association's Vice President. Past positions include Secretary, Treasurer and Second Vice President.

She recently helped develop an Association Vision Plan that provides strategies for NRCS to better serve its Tribal customers.



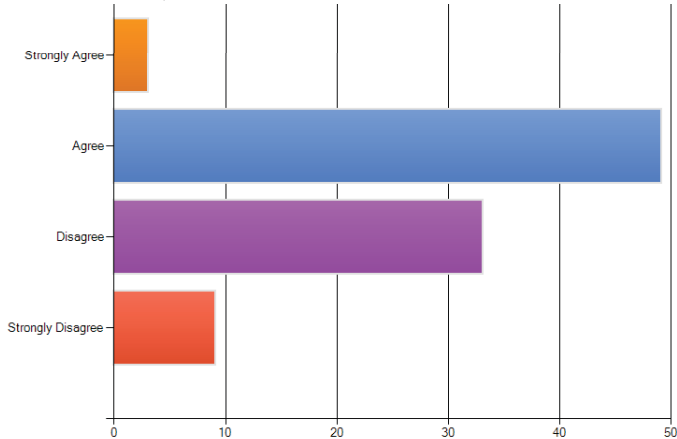
Two-County Management Units: Survey Results

Last spring NRCS surveyed state and federal employees working in two-county management units. We also surveyed SWCD commissioners and partners. The goal of the survey was to find out how employees felt the transition to two-county management units was progressing, how it had affected customer service, and how well leadership had prepared them for the transition. More than 90 people responded to the 10-question survey.

Based on the results, Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations are developing plans for working with their management units to help them with their transition and improving day-to-day operations. Leadership is also committed to making sure offices are fully staffed before transitioning into two-county management unit. Here are the survey results.

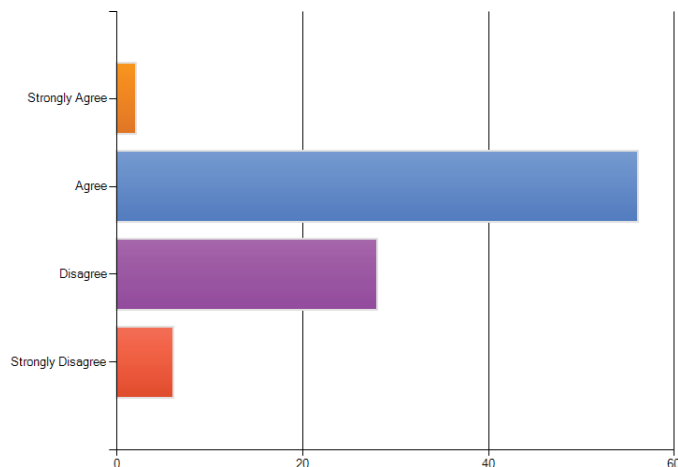
QUESTION ONE:

I felt adequately prepared for the transition to shared management.



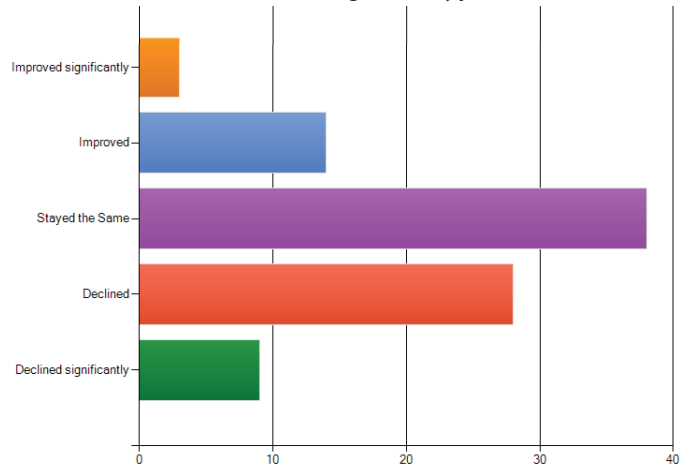
QUESTION TWO:

Since the transition to shared management, my actual job duties and roles have matched what I expected my duties and roles would be when the change was announced.



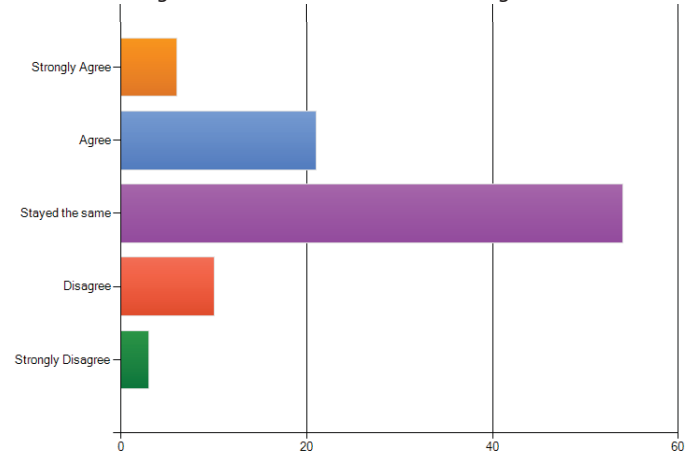
QUESTION THREE:

Since the transition to shared management my job satisfaction has:



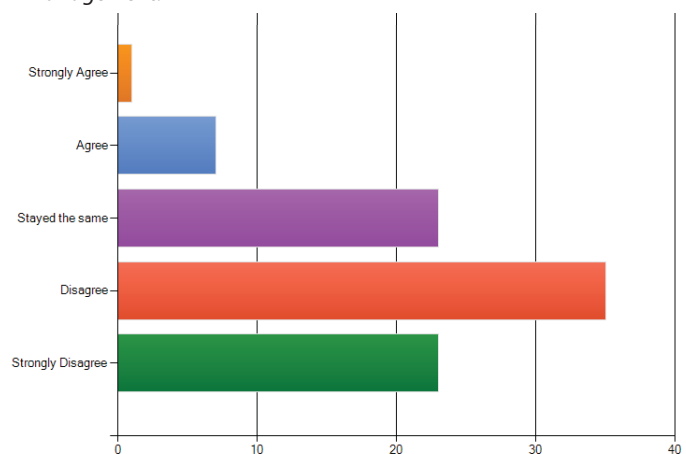
QUESTION FOUR:

My role in the conservation partnership and natural resource conservation has changed since transition to shared management.



QUESTION FIVE:

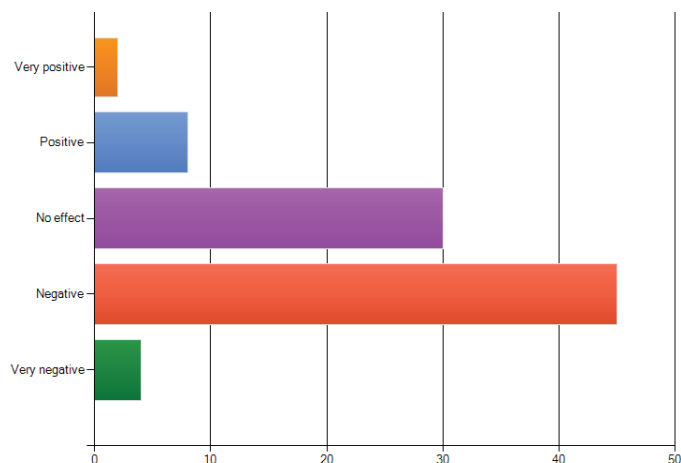
I believe field office operations are more efficient since transition to shared management.



Two-County Management Units: Survey Results Cont.

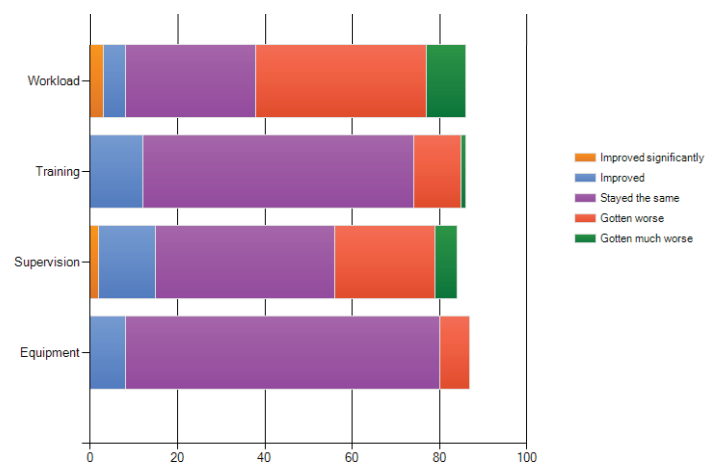
QUESTION SIX:

What effect has shared management had on customer satisfaction?



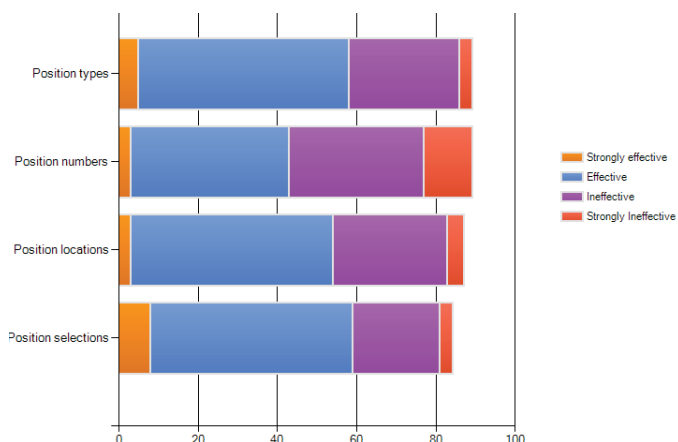
QUESTION NINE:

Since the transition to shared management please rate the following:



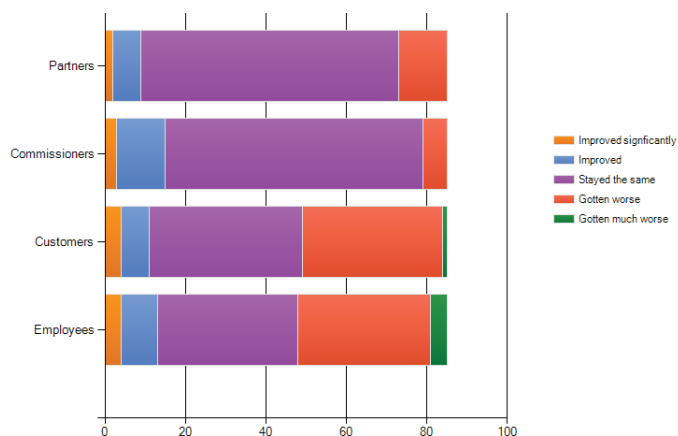
QUESTION SEVEN:

Please rate the following staffing features since the transition to shared management.



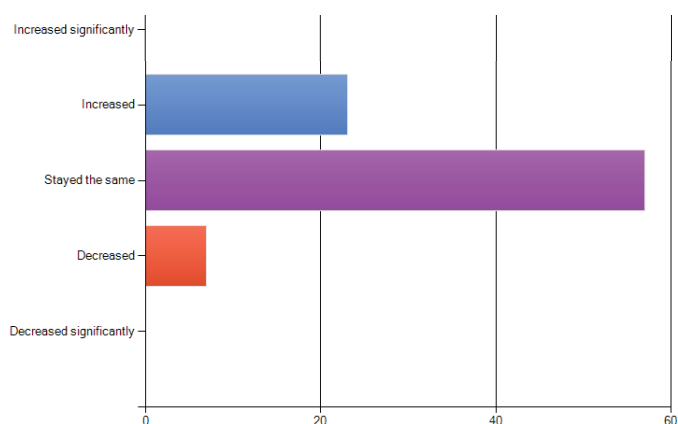
QUESTION TEN:

Since transition to shared management please rate communications with the following groups:



QUESTION EIGHT

Since the transition to shared management, customer complaints have:



Future Surveys:

The Leadership Team plans a follow up survey in the next six to 12 months to track our progress on some of the issues that need improvement.

Unlocking Efficiency: Progress Report Two— Soils Update

Each Leadership Team member was asked to provide progress on their efforts on the field's list of barriers. Following is the update from State Soil Scientist Mike Sucik.

RUSLE2 Issues

The updated yields for the soil types need to be loaded in RUSLE2. It requires tremendous staff time to continually input the updated soil info in RUSLE2. The extremely inefficient use of time to change the yields and to keep checking the yields during the RUSLE2 calculations. The program is complicated to utilize, loading the correct yields will reduce one step and allow for faster and more accurate use of the program.

Solution: Iowa NRCS has forwarded your request on numerous occasions to the National RUSLE2 database manager suggesting that eFOTG yields be linked to the RUSLE2 software. This is a decision that can not be resolved locally. RUSLE2 is a nationally adopted and developed software. We can continue to make the request, but it is a matter beyond the control of Iowa NRCS.

Dominant Critical vs. Predominant

The conservation planning/modification/revision process is a complete and total boondoggle. We switch between 'Dominant Critical' and 'Predominant' soil type depending on the type of planning we do. How about we pick a level of soil loss 5 tons, 6 tons, 7 tons, 8 tons, or T and make that the required soil loss so we can quit wasting time re-calculating soil losses over and over?

Solution: We agree, having multiple criteria for choosing soil map units for the various planning activities can be confusing and cumbersome. Your State Conservationist, Mr. Sims tried to make things simpler. He requested a variance from National Headquarters that would have allowed Iowa to use the Dominant Critical Soil Map Unit for both Compliance Planning and Conservation Planning purposes.

Unlocking Efficiency



National Headquarters denied Iowa's request due to statutory regulations of the Food Security Act of 1985 which requires NRCS to use the Predominant HEL soil map unit for Compliance Planning.

Web Soil Survey

Update the Web Soil Survey to include CSRs.

Solution: Iowa CSRs are available on the Web Soil Survey. After you have identified your area of interest, click on the SOIL DATA EXPLORER tab, then SUITABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS FOR USE. Iowa Corn Suitability Rating is found on the drop down menu next to the VEGETATIVE PRODUCTIVITY tab.

HEL Determinations

Need to scan old soil survey so it's available for use on Toolkit for those counties that have to use the old soil survey for HEL determinations. It's time consuming to find the sod busted field on the old soil survey and then dot counting acres is inaccurate.

Solution: We will not be digitizing archived copies of a historic soil survey for the sole purpose of making an HEL determination. Keep in mind that dot counting is only necessary when an ocular estimate shows that approximately 1/3 of the field is HEL. If, for example, a field is obviously more than 1/2 HEL, mark the field HEL and move on based on your ocular estimate. The same applies if the field shows that there is only a small fraction of HEL soils. Mark it NHEL, based on a visual estimate, and move on. There is no need to count dots when the determination is obvious.

H1N1: Guidelines for a Healthy Workforce



In preparation of an H1N1 outbreak, offices must be prepared to cover extended absences or multiple absences within an office. The symptoms are similar to symptoms of season flu and include,

but are not limited to, fever, cough, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. In an effort to reduce illness in NRCS offices, the following guidelines should be used:

- Offices will provide hand sanitizer for employee and public use.
- Provide tissues and disinfectants for employees to clean their work surfaces. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states that the virus can survive on surfaces and infect a person for 2 to 8 hours after being deposited.
- Promote hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Encourage sick employees to stay home and away from the workplace. USDA will follow the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance regarding pay and leave policies.
- If an employee has been exposed to someone with the flu and are well, they can come to work. These employees should monitor their health every day and if any symptoms develop, stay home from work.
- Encourage employees to get vaccinated when the vaccines become available.

If an employee is diagnosed with H1N1, the following steps must be taken:

- Employee or designee must contact their supervisor if a confirmed H1N1 diagnosis is received.
- Employee should stay home at least 24 hours after the fever is gone.
- Inform other employees of their exposure in the workplace with confirmed, probable, or suspected H1N1 flu during the ill person's infectious period (such disclosure of informa-

tion should be conducted with the privacy and confidentiality of the individual in mind. No individual names will be released).

Following are links from the Iowa Department of Public Health. First link contains general information regarding the virus:

www.idph.state.ia.us/h1n1/common/pdf/general_fact_sheet.pdf

And Link 2 is a fact sheet on cleaning:

www.idph.state.ia.us/h1n1/common/pdf/schools_general_fact_sheet.pdf

Other Helpful Links and Resources:

World Health Organization:

http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/what/en/index.html

Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/H1N1Flu/>

Official U.S. Government Web site managed by the Dept of Health & Human Services:

<http://www.flu.gov/>

Vilsack visits TEAM USDA at 2009 Iowa State Fair



US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visits with NRCS employee and Earth Team Coordinator Jill Clothier at the TEAM USDA booth at the 2009 Iowa State Fair this August. Vilsack hosted his Iowa visit for his Rural Tour event at the Iowa State Fair. The next day he visited with USDA employees at the Neal Smith Federal Building. More information on Sec. Vilsack's Rural Tour can be found at www.usda.gov and clicking on Rural Tour.

Photo Gallery: Hypoxia Meeting Tour



Representatives from federal and state agencies and other agriculture and environmental organizations joined together for a one-day Ag Tour during the 18th Meeting of the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force in Des Moines this September. The tour included a stop at a CREP wetland as well as several farming operations in the central part of the state. More than 75 people from around the country participated on the tour. More information on the Task Force is available at www.epa.gov/msbasin/index.htm. (All photos courtesy of IDALS-DSC).



Guess who?



ISU Learning Farm's Matt Helmers demonstrates the rainfall simulator.



US Deputy Under Secretary of Agriculture Ann Mills and Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey



Jim Gillespie, Field Services Bureau Chief, DSC



Aquanda Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Fort Dodge, discusses prairie pothole region natural resource concerns with the bus tour group.

Changes In: NRCS Personnel

Name	Official Title	Grade	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Boyland,Erika V.	Soil Conservationist	9	9/27/09	Career Intern Appointment	Oskaloosa FO
Bradley,Shiloh M.	Resource Conservationist	11	8/2/2009	Reassignment	Burlington FO
Bronson,Jessica J.	Resource Conservationist	9	8/16/09	Reassignment	Northwood FO
Bruce,Joanne E.	Program Specialist	9	8/16/09	Conversion to Temporary Appointment	Easement Programs Team
Bucklin, John M.	Soil Conservationist	7	9/27/09	Conversion to Career Intern Appointment	Atlantic FO
Groth, Jacob. C.	Soil Conservationist	7	9/27/09	Conversion to Career Intern Appointment	Waukon FO
Heim, Roger H.	Soil Conservation Technician	7	9/27/09	Reassignment	Corydon FO
Hempy, Craig G.	Resource Conservationist	11	9/27/09	Promotion	Nevada FO
Henderson, Michael P.	Soil Conservationist	9	9/13/09	Career Appointment	Epworth FO
Henke, Darwin F.	Soil Conservation Technician	6	8/2/09	Reassignment	Primghar FO
Holcomb, Shaun D.	RC&D Coordinator	11	8/2/09	Temporary Promotion	Maquoketa RC&D
Hurley, Eric Glen	Natural Resource Specialist	11	8/2/09	Career Conditional Appointment	Ecological Sciences Staff
Jones, Frank Nathaniel	Soil Conservationist	7	9/27/09	Career Intern Appointment	Manchester FO
Jones, Wendell B.	District Conserva-tionist	12	8/2/09	Change in Title	Iowa City, FO
Mensing, Tony Joe	Agricultural Engineer	7	9/27/09	Career Intern Appointment	Sioux City AO
Paulin, John T.	RC&D Coordinator	12	8/16/09	Promotion	Ames RC&D
Sprague, Richard A.	District Conservationist	11	8/2/09	Change in Title	Corning FO
Zimek, Leiah Danielle	Soil Conservation Technician	5	9/27/09	Career Intern Appointment	Iowa City FO

Changes In: IDALS-DSC Personnel

Name	Official Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Erwin, Mike	Environmental Specialist	8/28/2009	Separation	Mahaska SWCD
Oakley, Denny	Soil Technician	8/26/2009	Retirement	Marion SWCD
Vanderpool, Glenn	Soil Technician	9/11/20009	Retirement	Jasper SWCD
Walker, Angi	Secretary	9/17/20009	Transfer	Tama SWCD
Whitson, Irene	Secretary	9/30/2009	Retirement	Wapello SWCD